

2022 Rural Maryland Council Legislative Review

The Maryland General Assembly adjourned Sine Die on April 11, 2022, after final passage of the Fiscal Year 2023 operating budget and bills concerning paid family leave, cannabis legalization, environmental protections, state parks, and tax relief for retirees. The Rural Maryland Council and their associated grant programs - the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund and the Maryland Agricultural Education Rural Development Assistance Fund, received historic funding of \$9,001,144 in Fiscal Year 2023. We thank Governor Larry Hogan, Senate President Bill Ferguson and House Speaker Adrienne Jones for their support.

Operation and Capital Budget Highlights

With a surplus in the budget and additional federal funding, the FY2023 budget provided much needed funding for many state agencies, departments and programs. The final budget appropriations for FY2023 is \$61 billion. General funds were increased by \$6.9 billion (32%), including an education aide increase of \$500 million. Final action on the budget leaves an estimated cash balance of \$219 million at the end of FY2023, in addition to \$2.4 billion in the Rainy Day Fund.

Historic RMC Funding

The RMC received \$9 million in funding for FY2023. This funding will be highly beneficial to those who live, work, and visit the many great rural areas of our state. This funding will mostly go towards the RMPIF and MAERDAF grant programs. Requests for the grant programs have grown each year, resulting in many quality projects being turned down. The additional funding will allow more projects to help improve the lives of rural Marylanders. The projects will provide innovative programming that creates jobs, educational opportunities, and enhances the quality of life in our rural communities. For many nonprofit organizations and stakeholders, RMPIF provides the critical support needed to fuel healthy, and resilient rural communities.

Rural Maryland Economic Development Fund

Maryland's five regional councils were funded at \$10 million each through the Rural Maryland Economic Development Fund. The \$50 million in funding will allow the regional councils to fund projects for infrastructure, transportation, and broadband to support the attraction, retention, or expansion of businesses, and infrastructure related to industry sector development. Funding will also be spent for workforce development and attraction of talent, and projects that stimulate entrepreneurship and innovation. Additionally, planning and feasibility studies, and certain capital and operational expenses may be funded as well. This funding will allow Maryland's five Regional Council's to provide the necessary resources that rural communities need to recover from the economic downturn caused by the pandemic.

RMC Budget Priorities Achieved Under Senate Bills 290 and 291

- ⇒ RMC will receive \$9 million for the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund and RMC operations.
- ⇒ The Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund will receive \$118,485.
- ⇒ \$10 million each for the five Regional Councils through the Rural Maryland Economic Development Fund.
- ⇒ \$20.0 million for the Western Maryland Economic Future Investment Board and Senator George C. Edwards Fund.
- ⇒ Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Program will receive a total of \$72 million.
- ⇒ \$ 3.7 million for Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO).
- ⇒ Program Open Space will receive \$89.3 million for State side and \$167 million for Local side.
- ⇒ Rural Legacy Program funded at \$26.4 million.
- ⇒ Department of Housing and Community Development funded at \$17.8 million.

Thank you to Senator Edwards, Delegate Beitzel, and Delegate McIntosh for their many years of service and dedication to Rural Maryland!



RMC Chair, John Hartline and Executive Director, Charlotte Davis (right) present Senator Edwards (left) the 2021 Rural Champion Award (Photo by Edwin Remsberg)

Outreach Events

Maryland Day was celebrated on March 25th, the RMC held a Grab and Go Lunch for the Legislators at Lawyers mall in downtown Annapolis. The event was sponsored by the Maryland Broadband Cooperative, MARBIDCO, Southern Maryland Agriculture Development Commission, MidAtlantic Farm Credit, Maryland Department of Agriculture, and the Maryland Heritage Areas Coalition. The lunches consisted of locally grown foods and were provided by Caroline County's Chesapeake Culinary Arts Center.

Rural Maryland Day was celebrated virtually this year on February 10th. The event provided an opportunity for over 100 rural advocates to meet with key legislators to discuss both the strengths and challenges experienced living in rural Maryland.

Great Maryland Outdoors Act

SB541 (Senator Elfreth) and HB383 (Delegate Luedtke)

The Great Maryland Outdoors Act will make much needed investments to Maryland's state parks and replace and accelerate the current repayment schedule for the previous diversions of funds from Program Open Space. This Act will benefit Maryland's agricultural and land preservation programs by obtaining more resources for preservation, provide more staffing to address the crumbling facilities and overuse of state parks, and benefit Maryland's rural economies by attracting more visitors to state parks located in rural communities. Funds include \$10 million for Next Generation Farmland Acquisition Program, \$16.6 million for MALPF and \$5.4 million for the Rural Legacy Program in Fiscal Year 2024. Additionally, the State Lakes Protection and Restoration Fund was extended to 2025, and the Mel Noland Woodland Incentives and Fellowship Fund increased from \$50,000 to \$1 million.

Rural Legislative Highlights:

- Providing more funding and resources for hazard mitigation. (SB814/HB1312 Sponsors: Senator Hester, Delegate Watson)
- Increasing the annual revenues cap for cottage food businesses. (HB178 Sponsor: Delegate Chang)
- Providing more opportunities for small universities to qualify for matching funds for private donations through the E-Innovation Fund. (SB473/HB730 Sponsors: Senator Edwards, Delegate Buckel)
- Encouraging apprenticeship opportunities by extending the Apprenticeship and Training Council. (SB205: Sponsor Senator McCray)
- Connecting local farmers with programs that provide nutritious foods to schools and those in need. (SB121/HB147 Sponsors: Senator Hester, Delegate Charkoudian)
- Expanding dental services to low income adults. (SB150/HB6 Sponsors: Senator Augustine, Delegate Cullison)
- Increasing the share of Highway User Revenue funds to local governments to maintain roads. (SB105/HB1187: Sponsors: Senator Augustine, Delegate Cullison)
- Increasing the minimum monthly benefit for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). (SB957/HB456 Sponsors: Delegate Valentino-Smith, Senator Waldstreicher)



Photo: RMC Executive Director Charlotte Davis and MARBIDCO Executive Director Steve McHenry with Delegate Edith Patterson during the 2022 Maryland Day Celebration at Lawyers' Mall.

Legislative Highlights

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EVENTS HELD

Virtual Legislative Lunch, 1/28

Virtual Rural Maryland Day, 2/10

Maryland Day Lunch, Lawyers Mall, 3/25

10

LEGISLATIVE MEETINGS

The Legislative Committee met this session to discuss bills, testimonies, and other legislative matters

84

POSITION STATEMENTS

Position statements submitted to the legislators in support of bills

254

BILLS MONITORED

Total bills monitored throughout the legislative session

RMC is grateful for the hard work of its Legislative Committee and rural advocates who made the 2022 session a success.